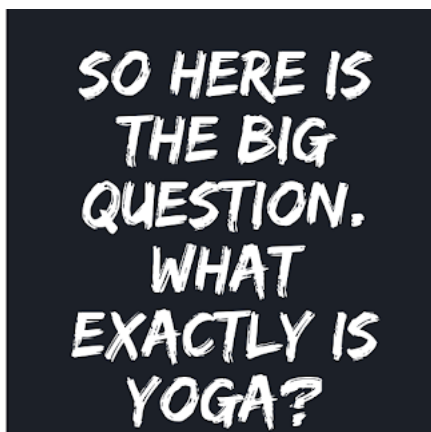
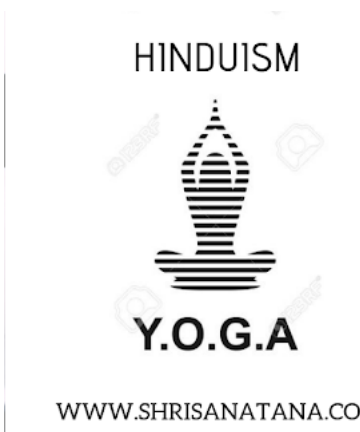


[Home](#) > [English](#) > [Is Yoga Indian? Is it Hindu? Is it religious? Or is it secular?](#)

Is Yoga Indian? Is it Hindu? Is it religious? Or is it secular?



So here is the big question. What exactly is Yoga?

Is Yoga Indian? Is it Hindu? Is it religious? Or is it secular?

Before we answer this question, we must first recognize that none of these labels do Yoga justice. It was **Europeans** and **Americans** who came up with such labels to easily compartmentalize **India's traditions**. But force-fitting Indian ideas into categories created by the **West** only makes matters worse.

Truth is -- Yoga is Hindu, Indian, Religious, and Secular at the same time. It is Hindu because Hindu religious texts refer to it regularly and deities like **Krishna** and **Shiva** are also known as Yogeshwara. The **Bhagwad Gita** itself refers to paths like **Karma Yoga, Gyana Yoga, and Bhakti Yoga**. The connection between Yoga and **Hinduism** is undeniable.

Yoga is Indian because it originated in the Indian sub-continent and spread to other parts of the world from India. Yogic ideas made their way into other schools of philosophy- including those like **Jainism** and **Buddhism**.

In fact, the **Japanese** word '**Zen**' comes from the Sanskrit word "**Dhyaan**".

Yoga is secular because in most aspects of its practice, the idea of god is of very little importance. One does not have to believe in god to practice or benefit from Yoga. In fact, acknowledging the divine is understood to be secondary to awareness and understanding.

Yoga has been a worldwide phenomenon for quite some time now. But in the West, its physical aspects – the **asanas** – have become more important than its psychological aspect. As a result, it has come to be associated with words like "**new age**" and "**hippie**".

Since some people oppose Yoga on the grounds that it has religious undertones, others have started defending it by saying there is nothing Hindu about it. Some even go so far as saying that it is neither **spiritual, nor Indian or Hindu**. This in turn, further emphasizes the physical-only interpretation of Yoga.

Such a defence of Yoga serves to empower even more misinterpretation by some **Western scholars** who say that **modern Yoga** was re-invented by the West. They consider the source of Yoga to be obscure texts that **European** Orientalists rediscovered. This happens because many **Western** scholars fail to come to terms with the fact that in ancient India, things did not have to be written down to be real. Traditions such as Yoga were being transmitted

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from teachers to students orally and ritually long before **Patanjali** penned down the **Yoga Sutras**.

Euro-centric scholars even go so far as to dismiss all assertions by Indians who seek to reclaim their heritage and call their views patriarchal propaganda. In response, some Hindus dismiss all Western scholarship on India and start denying the secular aspect of Yoga, labeling those they disagree with as **"Hindu-phobic"**.

“ The truth about Yoga therefore, lies somewhere in the middle. The question about Yoga's true nature cannot be answered by putting it in folders. It can be answered by recognizing that the need to label Yoga is a mental trap. ”

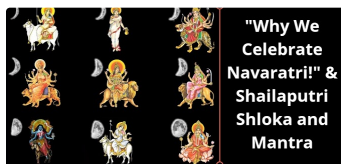
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